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LETTER DATED 10 FEBRUARY 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you a statement issued by the Foreign Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia on 10 February 1999.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Statement issued by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia on 10 February 1999

On 12 May 1998, Eritrea carried out an act of aggression against Ethiopia and occupied its territory. Since then, various attempts have been made by third parties to avert the widening of the crisis and to facilitate a peaceful resolution. Ethiopia has done whatever was necessary to cooperate with those who have made their good offices available and to give peace a chance. It has never even once shown lack of cooperation with those who extended their facilitation to remove the cause of the crisis. No one, least of all the United Nations and those involved in the various efforts to broker peace, could have failed to observe the patience Ethiopia has shown in the face of Eritrea's egregious obstinacy and contempt for the role of third parties. Eritrea wanted to negotiate with itself and on its own terms.

Ethiopia accepted the peace plan put forward by the United States of America and Rwanda; Eritrea rejected it. Ethiopia expressed its readiness to embrace the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Framework Agreement which was characterized by the Security Council as fair and balanced. Eritrea, after dragging its feet for a while, finally said it sought clarification before it would pronounce itself on the OAU peace proposal. After the OAU clarification was provided, Eritrea thought it would sleep on it, in the meantime continuing to prevaricate with the clear intention of avoiding being pinned down. All this while still occupying Ethiopian territory, from which thousands of Ethiopians have been uprooted and are now living in caves.

The final Eritrean response to the OAU peace plan came on 6 February 1999, after already having violated the air strike moratorium the previous day, when Eritrea mounted a large-scale military offensive on the Badme-Shiraro front, thus imposing war on Ethiopia and leaving Ethiopia with only one option, which is to exercise its right of self-defence which, like all sovereign States, is its right under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. Eritrea by resorting once again to force intended to create a new scenario which would sideline the OAU peace plan. This cannot be allowed to succeed.

What has been clear all along has been made all the more clear now. The Eritrean authorities are determined to get what they want and what is not theirs through force, whatever the consequences for peace. International law does not count for the Eritrean authorities. What they have is contempt for peace proposals unless those proposals are drafted in Asmara and unless all they contain is the Eritrean view and ideas reflecting Eritrean interests, including their desire to keep what they have taken through aggression.

Ethiopia has always made it clear that, while it would always be second to none in its commitment to peace, it would never ever allow the violation of its sovereign territory to be rewarded and the dignity of its people to be insulted.

The road to peace is clear and it has been charted by the Organization of African Unity. Eritrea has so far refused to respect the voice of Africa

because it has concluded that the international community is unlikely to bring effective and meaningful pressure to bear on Asmara. Stay put, prevaricate and cause the deterioration of the situation and then both the aggressor and the aggressed would probably be put on the same level: this is what Eritrea has been counting on - a victory for the aggressor in a situation where international law is made a mockery of.

Ethiopia calls once again upon the international community to prevail upon Eritrea to accept and implement the OAU Framework Agreement for peace proposed by African heads of State. The United Nations cannot ignore this. Africa should not allow it. The Security Council should not and must not encourage the aggressor country to defy the Organization of African Unity and the Security Council as well; after all, the Council itself is on record as having endorsed the OAU Framework Agreement as fair and balanced.

Let me conclude by saying that our unlimited readiness to cooperate with third parties who have worked for peace, our patience in the face of aggression and our flexibility should not be mistaken for being prone to being pushed around.